DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 328 CE 016 108

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TITLE Education and Work.
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PUB DATE 26 Feb 78
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Educational Research Symposium "School and after" (Peebles, Scotland, 26 February - 3 March 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Adult Education; Cooperative Planning; Educational Change; Educational Development; Educational Needs; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Employment; Employment Potential; Employment Practices; Employment Trends; *General Education; *Interaction; Preschool Education; Research Needs; School Industry Relationship; *School Role; Social Attitudes; Social Change; Socioeconomic Influences; Student Employment; *Vocational Education; Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *World of Work

ABSTRACT

In this speech the author examines the contact points between education and the world of work and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the relation of the two systems. He identifies and evaluates the following major areas of contact: (1) pre-school education, which is growing for children as both parents increasingly choose to work, but whose value is unclear and requires more research; (2) basic education, which often stresses ranking children according to their performance so that the outside world may judge them as potential employees, rather than giving them the orientation they need towards their living environment; (3) lower secondary level, which often divides students into vocational or theoretical training and thus unfairly determines their future; (4) upper secondary and higher education, in which many students try out their career interests and capabilities while in school by working during vacation or at part-time jobs, but which suffers from the same classification problem as earlier schooling; and (5) adult education, which of all the types of education is least influenced by the distinction between general and vocational education and should be defined in terms of the student's own preferences. The author concludes that both schools and work life are undergoing periods of change during which the role of education as a disseminator of knowledge and in social selection is weakening and society's attitudes toward work is turning from negative to positive. His vision for the future pictures the conscious development of the two systems in a way that each may contribute to the desirable development of the other. (ELG)

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ED159324

CE

Strasbourg, 26 February 1978

DECS/Rech (78) 19
Or. Engl.

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Educational Research Symposium "School and after",
at Peebles, Hydro Hotel, Scotland,
26 February - 3 March 1978

EDUCATION AND WORK

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EDUCATION AND WORK

by Kjell Eide

Stating that there should be more contact between education and work seems to be a sure way of achieving consensus in most circles these days. Conservatives will stress preparation for work as an essential function of the school, and that contact with work life will make the young more realistic and disciplined. Labour representatives will emphasize the inherent value of work and the importance of experiencing the solidarity among workers. From a more populist point of view, local work life is an essential part of that reality which should mark even the work in school. And while Marxists might warn against the school as a servant of monopoly capitalism, the interplay between theory and practice is still a main concern of theirs, with nearly magical properties associated with "praxis".

Such overwhelming agreement about a general idea calls for some sceptisism. Probably, contact between school and work means something quite different to the various parties concerned, or at least they interpret the consequences of such contacts in quite different ways.

One common experience should perhaps be born in mind in this context. Usually, one can easily come to the agreement that integration is a good thing. Yet, it is rare to find any individual, group, institution or administration wanting to become "integrated" with some other body. Co-ordination and integration are perhaps phenomena that looks different when seen from the inside, as compared to an outside view.

I am thus suggesting that there is much more ambivalence towards the integration of school and work

life than would appear from the immediate reaction to such propositions. There is, however, one exception to this rule:

Some groups, and even countries, see education solely as a delivery system for the economy, producing manpower according to specifications given by the latter. In this case there is little room for ambivalence, education is seen exclusively as a subservient activity with a clearly defined master.

For my part, I cannot accept such a narrow definition of the role of education in society. Quite apart from the fact that the genuine educational needs of the economy cannot be defined with any operational degree of precision, most societies have other legitimate concerns than those expressed by the GNP. One has at least to take into account unpaid work, which even in industrialized countries may amount to nearly as much as the GNP when translated into monetary terms. Beyond that, we have all some ideas about an effectively functioning society with broad participation in decisions and engagement in citizen functions. We also have ideas about the desirable development of individuals, which cannot be reduced to measurements of work performance.

But if education has other functions than preparing for work, the economy also serves more functions than just producing marketable goods and services. One of them is clearly a learning function. Maybe the learning function associated with work has declined over time, but I am not sure that this is a necessary consequence of modern technological development. Yet, to see this learning function as the predominant task of the economy, would be as narrow-minded as to see the school solely as a manpower producing factory.

We are in fact dealing with two major systems in our societies. Like all societal subsystems, they are mutually interdependent, but they emphasize different values, they define their tasks differently, they organize differently and they represent different sets of competencies.

Our ambivalence towards such phenomena, however, goes even deeper. We know that many individuals feel alienated in work life, because jobs are too specialized, too routinized and meaningless. The individual cannot see his own work as contributing to any meaningful purpose, and has little possibility of influencing his own work sitation. There are few rewards in terms of creative efforts or the development of personal capabilities. Improvement in one's situation can only be achieved through competition, at the expense of somebody else.

But work life is also experienced as the place where we can find an outlet for our creative abilities, where we enjoy genuine collaboration with others, commitment and solidarity. What happens at work influences our life situation more than anything else, it largely determines our self-conception and our relationship to others.

Thus work is a curse, and work provides an essential part of the meaning of life. This ambivalence is even reflected in predominent religious and ethical notions. We grow and emancipate ourselves through our productive efforts. But we also grow and find emancipation through the development of our interactions with other humans. Here are two notions of growth - maybe two growth ideologies - which run parallel in many cultures, and which easily get into conflict.

We should not, however, forget the school in this context. That, too, is a two-sided coin.

We attack the school because it functions as the key social selection mechanism for human beings in our societies. It directs young people towards positions in the social rank order which are suspiciously like those held by their parents. But it provides this ranking with an apparently rational and objective legitimation.

Since what the school expects from the pupils is usually not too meaningfull to them, external rewards become decisive. The most important reward is just to win in the competition for attaining high ranking social positions. Once more, we are faced with a formal gain which can only be achieved at the expense of others. Here is an essential message conveyed by the school, irrespective of what official values it might proclaim.

When the school defines problems, it does so within the framework of the structure according to which our theoretical knowledge is organized. The nature of this structure is such that as long as one stays within it's well defined parts, all questions can be answered on the basis of expert authority. More essential problems which cannot be left solely to experts, cannot readily be accommodated within this theoretical structure of knowledge. Such questions, often regarded by the pupils as essential to their own interests, are not easily taken up by the school, because they have no "objective" answers. Thus the way we transfer knowledge, and our conception of what problems are really relevant, easily get into conflict. Children and youth in education must bear the main consequences of this situation. They are at the bottom of a hierarchy of command, and can often only influence their own situation by withdrawing their efforts.

Again we know that there is another side to the reality

of the school. For many, it provides opportunities for self realization and growth. It offers opportunities for constructive interaction with others, peers as well as grown ups. It introduces youth to a world of knowledge which is no longer a monopoly of the school, but which the school still may find stimulating ways of transferring. At least to some extent, educational institutions and their teachers master their new role, to assist the individual pupil in a form of personal development that at least partly takes place on his or her own premises.

What if de-schooling succeeded? We would then undoubtably have to reinvent the school. Till now, we have found no other institution capable of filling the functions of the school as we know them. The school is an instrument for socialization into society in both its good and its bad aspects. But it is also a basis for the individual's ability to influence his or her own situation in this society.

All this is not an attempt to confuse issues. I only want to point out that it makes no sense to be <u>for</u> work life, or <u>against</u>. Nor can we sensibly be <u>for</u> school, or <u>against</u> it. We are dealing with two different systems, each of them subjects to strong external pressures, as well as internal tensions. Both are dynamic systems in constant change.

What this means is that both systems carry their own set of values, which at any time may be both unclear and even internally contradictory. And those values are constantly changing, depending both on external pressures and shifts in the internal power structure.

Attempts to bring the two systems in closer contact must, if they have any reality, by necessity influence such internal structures in both systems and their future development. And we must face the fact, that such closer collaboration will not necessarily reinforce tendencies within each of the systems which we all find desirable. The opposite can well be the case, that closer contact strenghtens such features in both systems which many find undesirable. The closest possible collaboration or integration between two systems is not by itself a good thing. Admittedly, integration usually promotes consistency in behaviour. But even consistency in behaviour is not by itself a good thing; behaviour may well be consistently wrong.

Let's run through some of the main areas of contact between formal education and work life. In doing so, we might add some substance to the more theoretical considerations above.

Pre-school education is spreading rapidly in many countries. The pressure behind it seems primarily to stem from assumed needs of the economy for more female manpower. In a number of countries the pressure for a more equal status for women may be an important factor, especially among the more well educated. The former may have an element of fictitious "growth", due to transfer from unpaid work to paid work, more visible in GNP terms. The latter may sometimes run counter to its own purpose by preventing more far-reaching reforms in work life, permitting both parents

to share family obligations.

Yet, assuming that the two purposes mentioned are worth pursuing, it does not follow that extending school down to a very early age is by necessity beneficial to all children. It is debatable whether an institutional climate is most condusive to the growth of a 4-5 years old child. We know, in fact, many environments that in most respects are better for children than the kindergarten. Admittedly, in most urban societies, such alternatives are difficult to find. But this may simply be due to the fact that when constructing urban societies, we have never been concerned with creating an appropriate environment for children at all. Our mistakes in this respect are no valid excuse for being satisfied with substitutes.

Furthermore, pre-school education as we know it in many countries, tend to become a feeder institution for schools of the traditional type. The virtues of pushing children into the rat-race for school achievement at the age of 4 or 5, are very dubious indeed. In addition, the assumed contributions of pre-school education to equality of opportunity still remain a postulate. No one should be surprised if the efforts to extend pre-school education lead to even less equality.

Summing up, there is a need for much more searching questions relating to the whole development of pre-school education in many countries. To what extent does it serve as an excuse for <u>not</u> facing the need for more basic structural changes in work life, and in the physical and social environment of the family? Are we sacrificing the interests of small children for some dubious aims in terms of GNP growth?

In basic education, there is no doubt that its function as a feeder mechanism for education at higher levels has prevented it from offering the kind of education most appropriate for children at this age. Less emphasis on theoretical subjects, and more orientation towards the living environment which children are already acquainted with, would certainly give us a better school. Work life is an important part of this environment, although as much in terms of unpaid work as of paid.

Reorganizing curricula and active use of the environment in educational contexts are some of the answers. But one may also question how much time children at this age should necessarily spend facing their teacher. In my own country, already then highly industrialized and wealthy, children in many parts of the country went to primary school two or three days in a week as late as twenty years ago. They still have a very short school day, without apparent negative consequenses for their educational progress. One may ask whether there is a tendency to exaggerate the importance of exposing children to teachers for a maximum amount of time, or whether we have failed to create living environments outside school in which children can thrive at all?

In many countries children are ranked according to their performance already early in primary school. This may be the only way in which teachers can handle children in a school offering little of interest and meaning to the children themselves. The excuse that such ranking is needed as signals to the outside world, is hardly a valid one. As long as we maintain that, at least in principle, the economy should offer a place to everyone capable of working, it matters little whether employer A can choose the pupil with the best performance, or whether that pupil goes to employer B.

The postulated connection between school and work life demanding careful relative ranking of school performance, is largely an excuse for maintaining an essential instrument for the school in exerting its authority towards the pupils.

Compulsory education have often been extended into the lower secondary level. At this stage, pupils are often divided into streams offering theoretical or practical subjects. The essential difference, however, in terms of the pupils' future, is that being directed into a practical stream means being cut off from the parts of the educational system offering the most attractive future opportunities. Sometimes, pupils who do not do too well in school, are also provided practical job experience, part-time or even full-time.

As the schools are, there is no doubt that many pupils have difficulties in coping with theoretical subjects. To some pupils, work may be an escape from constant defeats in school, and even provide a better learning environment. Yet, one cannot escape the question whether pupils should be adopted to the school, or whether the school is there to serve the pupils as they are. Practical training may be a pedagogically sound offer to pupils at this stage. But it is also proved beyond doubt that separating children at this age in ways which irreversably determine their future, is deeply unfair to them,and without any valid basis. And there is no guarantee that loosers in school will suddenly start blooming the moment they enter work. As work life is organized, chances are that they will become loosers even there. It is an illusion to think that work life as it is to-day, and especially the jobs offered to young school leavers, has either

therapeutic effects or significant learning effects, except in a rather limited number of cases.

Largely, the situation is still that being relegated to a practical stream means that the high prestige part of the school system, the theoretical streams, will not be bothered with you any more. And if schools can dispose of their most difficult pupils by having them employed, and even get a kind of pedagogical legitimation for this, the life of teachers becomes much happier. The balance between constructive use of practical work in school or outside as a pedagogical device, or as a means of disposing pupils who prevent the school from doing what it considers it prime tasks, is a very delicate one indeed.

Probably, schools will never get out of this dilemma until "good" pupils find it as natural to pick up practical subjects and even work experience as the less theoretically oriented ones. But this can never be achieved as long as such pedagogically motivated choices are permitted to decide the individual youngster's whole future. Either the selection function of the school must be abandoned all together, or one must envisage a society with quite limited differences in terms of income, power and prestige between the theoretically and practically able.

However, provided that work life can be reorganized in a way which would offer genuine learning opportunities for young, relatively untrained workers, and provided that educational institutions at higher levels emphasize strongly work experience as a criterion for access, some of the worst consequenses of the present system may be modified. This area of contact between education and work life is, in fact, one which has a major potential. The constructive use of this potential, however, would take major structural changes both within school and in work life. But if the willingness

to undertake such changes is lacking, contacts could easily take forms that make both systems function worse in respect of essential societal objectives.

In upper secondary and higher education, there is wide scope for collaboration aiming at providing the students with real experience of the conditions of work life, more or less related to their future professional activities. However, some of the same reservations as mentioned in the previous section, are valid even at this stage. If work experience becomes a means of screening off the students not suited, according to the schools judgement, for the top of the educational hierarchy, existing inequalities and social privileges may be reinforced.

One may have visions of an interplay between school and work which permit youngsters to try out their interests and capabilities by choosing freely between educational and job opportunities, feeling secure in their possibility of returning to the other system without substantial personal losses. This would go for grown ups as well. Yet, in most countries the two systems are not by far prepared for such balanced interchanges.

Compulsory periodes of work might be introduced as part of further studies, or as a condition for entry to such studies. Such arrangements may make sense, provided that the work experience is a real one, offering genuine learning experience, and constituting a meaningful part of the operation of economic undertakings. Experience from several countries indicates that such conditions are not easily fullfilled.

In this context, one should not overlook the tendency among students in secondary and higher education to find jobs for themselves for shorter periodes during their holidays, or part time jobs parallel to their studies. Even in countries where means for financing studies are easily available, such tendencies among students do prevail, and even increase. In many cases, it primarily reflects a desire among students to become more economically independent of their families, but it provides at the same time an opportunity for quite widespread experiences of work life. Although often escaping official manpower statistics, this practice of students may be an important factor in the context of manpower policy, amounting for example in the author's own country to as many man year equivalents as that of the total teacher stock within the whole educational system. As a consequence, students at higher levels often have a more varied experience of the realities of work life than their teachers.

The jobs in question are often short in duration, but they represent a very real contact with work life, without any artificial trainee arrangements. In many countries, it probably represents the most genuine form of contact between the educational system and outside work. Educational institutions have largely overlooked this phenomenon, or regarded it as a nuisance preventing students from consentrating on their studies. Maybe the educational institutions should regard such self initiated contacts with work life among the students more as an asset, and facilitate it and make more constructive use of it for educational purposes.

Many countries have undergone a rapid change in their attitude towards criteria for access to the upper levels of the educational system. Increasingly, work experience is regarded as a relevant qualification for further studies, parallel to formal qualifications acquired within the educational system. This recognition of real qualifications gained through work experience must be widely extenced, if interchange between education and work shall become more of a regular pattern. As yet, most school systems penalize youngsters who have chosen work experience instead of further school based learning.

Major changes also requires a reversal of the tendency within work life to give definite preference to formal qualifications obtained within educational institutions as compared to qualifications acquined through work experience. The tendency to sort out youngsters primarily according to the amount of theoretical training they have had, can partly be kept in check by educational reforms. Primarily, it calls for structural changes in work life itself.

Many countries experience an increased age range among students in upper secondary and higher education, reflecting a tendency among young people and grown ups to return to the school system after often extensive work experience. Educationally, this is an extremely interesting challenge, offering possibilities for creating educational situations in which the varied experience of the students is a major pedagogical asset. It implies, however, forms of teaching permitting this experience to be utilized, which often conflict with a traditional conception of the teacher as the one in a learning situation holding all the answers. More open learning situations, partly steered by the students themselves, is the logical answer to this challenge.

In work life, the possibilities for a development towards recurrent education depend upon opportunities for workers to get paid leave and the right to control decisions about who is in need of what kind of education. If such decisions are taken primarily on the basis of the narrowly defined interests of the individual enterprise and it's plans for promoting personnel, recurrent education can hardly realize its potential for serving more central societal objectives. The workers themselves must have a decisive say in such decisions, and educational needs must be defined in terms of the individual's own preferences.

Even within the educational system, the distinction between vocational and general education is gradually becoming less meaningful. In adult education, such a distinction has hardly any meaning whatsoever, and it distorts the whole purpose of recurrent education

if public support discriminates accordingly .

It should be added that the need for adult education is at least as strong for many groups not in salaried work. Whatever financial and other arrangements are made for the development of recurrent education, it should not be the basis for discrimination between those in salaried positions and the rest of the grown up population. The push from trade unions may be central in the gradual development of systems of recurrent education, but it should not lead us to forget the more general objectives of the ideal of life long learning.

It should be mentioned, however, that as workers gradually gain control over educational functions within work life, it may open up for much wider educational functions related to the work place. However, such developments are probably strongly dependent upon the emergence of new forms of work organization, increasing the learning capacity of economic organizations through the modification of traditional forms of division of labour and hierarchical command. We know from experiments in several countries on the democratization of work life, that they release a great demand for more education. It is essential that this demand should not be channelled towards the narrow objectives of traditional enterprise management.

Returning from this overview of potential areas of contact between education and work, a few conclusions

may be drawn concerning the more basic issues involved.

We know that in modern societies, the key position of the school as disseminator of knowledge is weakening, not least because of the general tendency towards information affluence caused by mass media. An even more important function for the school emerges in terms of assistance to both the young and the grown ups in the selection of information which they themselves find relevant. At the same time, the central role of the school in social selection may also be declining. Other qualities than those traditionally emphasized by the school may be regarded as more important by society at large, and the social ranking within society may in itself become less decisive for the individual's life situation.

This calls for major changes within the schools, both in terms of the kind of authority they exert and the role of individual teachers. Such changes will force themselves upon the school, as a consequence of changes in society at large.

But work life is also in a period of rapid change. We are gradually leaving the traditional attitude that work is an evil we have to suffer in order to survive, moving towards a conception of work as a human right. This calls for a kind of work life without unreasonable demands on the individual, but with rewards that goes far beyond the purely economic ones, in terms of possibilities for learning, personal development, social contact and meaningful work content.

Even in this field of society, such changes will force themselves through, partly because the traditional rewards and sanctions of work life will be less effective in the future. Richer societies can not in the long run allow unemployment for people who want to work. More egalitarian societies will make career hunting at the

the expence of others less necessary and perhaps also less respected. Claims for more participation in decisions and control over one's own situation in work life, are not only here to stay, but will probably grow stronger.

If such assumptions about future developments in education and in work life are at least partly valid, they open interesting vistas for collaboration in the long run. Contacts may be organized in a way so as to promote such developments within both systems.

In this dynamic perspective, the question is not one of adapting two existing systems to each other, the way they are to-day. It concerns the conscious development of each of the two systems in a way that may contribute to desirable developments within the other. As to the feasibility of such a policy, there are signs in several countries that indicate grounds for some optimism.

May be it is just a dream that in some distant future, we shall find societies where education and work are two sides of the same coin. It would imply that all education contribute to the individual's ability of creative performance, individually and collectively. It would also imply that all work has a meaning for those who perform it, offering also a potential for personal growth. This is an old dream, one of the visions that gives meaning to cultural traditions shared by most countries.

It would be an illusion, however, to think that this is something which one can wish into reality. It would take much more knowledge and insight than we have been able to develop till now. It would cause serious conflicts with many well established interests in our

societies. And it would require hard work and commitment by many, in all walks of life. But it may be worth while.